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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004031

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#) [OSCE](#)

SUBJECT: GOT DISCOURAGES VISIT TO SOUTHEAST BY GERMAN  
PROTESTANT CHURCH GROUP

REF: ANKARA 3638

Classified by Polcouns John Kunstadter; reasons 1.4 b and d.

1. (C) Summary: GOT officials tried to discourage a German Protestant Church delegation from visiting southeastern Turkey as part of a fact-finding mission on refugee issues. The Turkish press reported that the MFA and national intelligence organization (MIT) sent a letter warning governors not to meet with the group. The letter also reportedly accused the delegation of advocating a lifting of legal restrictions on the PKK in Germany; German embassy contact finds reports of the letter credible. Our German contact said the head of the Protestant Church will write a letter to the Turkish Ambassador in Berlin to protest the GOT's treatment of the group. End Summary.
2. (U) July 7 Thomas Bagger, political and press counselor at the German Embassy, confirmed to us Turkish press reports about problems faced by a delegation of Protestant Church representatives who visited Turkey on a fact-finding mission on refugee and asylum issues. The delegation, comprising members of a council of the Protestant Church of Germany and the Brussels-based Church Commission for Migrants in Europe, traveled to Ankara, Istanbul, Diyarbakir, Van, and Midyat during their June 6-17 visit.
3. (U) Bagger said the problems began in Berlin when the group was working with the Turkish Embassy on the itinerary. Turkish diplomats were cooperative at first, then suddenly told delegation members their plans to tour the southeast were "unwelcome" and they should limit their contacts to Ankara and Istanbul. The Protestant officials approached the German Foreign Ministry for help. The German Embassy in Ankara raised the matter with the MFA, but officials there were unsupportive.
4. (C) Governors and subgovernors in the southeast uniformly declined to meet with the 11-member delegation. The Turkish press reported that the MFA and Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT) sent a letter to the governors warning them not to meet with the group, and alleging that the delegation was working to remove restrictions on the PKK in Germany and promote recognition of the Armenian "genocide." Bagger told the press that if the existence of the letter is confirmed, it would harm bilateral relations. Bagger told us GOT officials both in Ankara and Berlin deny that any such letter was sent. However, he doesn't believe them -- a journalist whom Bagger regards as credible told him he had seen the letter.
5. (C) We tried to discuss the issue with the MFA, but could find no one who would take responsibility for the issue. We contacted five different MFA offices, as each one referred us to another office.
6. (U) In the event, the delegation met with UNHCR representatives, bar association attorneys, and NGO officials in the southeast. In Ankara and Istanbul the group met with parliamentarians, security officials, and European Commission representatives, as well as NGO leaders. AK Party MP Cavit Torun, a member of the parliamentary Human Rights Committee, invited the press to his meeting with the delegation. Torun accused delegation members of seeking to exploit problems in Turkey to convert Muslims to Christianity (Note: This was the same meeting in which Torun said President Bush and Saddam Hussein were both "tyrants" (reftel)).
7. (U) Bagger said the delegation came to Turkey primarily to collect information on how Turkish authorities handle refugee and asylum cases. The Protestant Church plays a major role in providing relief for refugees in Germany. The delegation was also interested in the return of Kurdish and Syriac migrants to the southeast, and the situation of Christian churches in Turkey.
8. (C) Bagger said the head of the Protestant Church of Germany will send a letter to the Turkish Ambassador in Berlin protesting the GOT's treatment of the delegation. Bagger expects the controversy to die there, though the event will "take its place on the list of concerns about Turkey."

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Comment  
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19. (C) PM Erdogan and other GOT leaders have recently expressed growing unease about visits to the southeast by European delegations. It is natural for visitors interested in human rights, or refugees, to tour the beleaguered region. But the Turks tend to view outsiders' interest in the southeast as promotion of Kurdish separatism. In the eyes of the Turkish government and State, this Protestant group raised fears about separatism and fed already deep and open prejudices against "Christian missionaries".  
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